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HOUSE RESOLUTION 259  
By Bowers

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Mr. Ernest C. Withers for his featured exhibition of "Pictures Tell the Story."

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that the members of this General Assembly should pause to pay tribute to those sterling citizens who, through their hard work, expertise, and dedication, have pieced together the enduring fabrics that comprise the grand tapestry of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, throughout its illustrious history, Tennessee has been blessed with countless exemplary citizens who have made significant contributions in the areas of commerce, industry, agriculture, manufacturing, education, research, and the arts; and

WHEREAS, it is vital for our continued growth and prosperity to continually expand, diligently preserve, and successfully recognize the expression of Tennessee's culture through visual art; and

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WHEREAS, numerous dedicated and exemplary artists of the state devote their extraordinary talent to expanding Tennessee's interests, facilitating our own culture, and heralding their admiration and respect of fellow Tennesseans; and

WHEREAS, one celebrated Tennessean who has transcended all others with his amazing photographs chronicling American history since the 1950s is Ernest C. Withers, the talented photographer whose life works will be featured at the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia on January 28 through May 7 of this year; and

WHEREAS, as a self-employed photographer in the American South, Mr. Withers was in the unique position to live and record modern American history through his lens; his photography subjects have ranged from the Civil Rights Movement, the baseball players of the Diamond League, to the blues and jazz performers in his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, previously heralded as the original photographer for the Civil Rights Movement, Ernest Withers has documented those turbulent times from the 1950s through the 1960s; and

WHEREAS, at the very onset of the Civil Rights Movement, Mr. Withers produced a book focusing on the Emmet Till murder that later became a pivotal influence for the push toward equal rights; and

WHEREAS, in the 1950s, Ernest Withers documented the lives of the players of the Diamond League, a Negro baseball league formed in response to organized baseball denying African Americans the chance to play professional baseball; his illustrious photographs depicted such baseball icons as Jackie Robinson and Willie Mays; and

WHEREAS, growing up in Memphis, Mr. Withers was raised to the beat of the music constantly overheard on legendary Beale Street; he captured this Memphis sound with his ever-ready camera, photographing early performances of Memphis blues and jazz greats, including Elvis Presley, B.B. King, and Aretha Franklin; and

WHEREAS, this important show is the first retrospective exhibition and major monograph of the superb photography of Ernest Withers; after its stint at the Chrysler Museum of Art is finished, the exhibit will travel to other venues and will be accompanied by a lavishly illustrated book; and

WHEREAS, Ernest Withers epitomizes the spirit and commitment that is characteristic of a true Tennessean; and

WHEREAS, the exhibition is organized by Brooks Johnson, Curator of Photography at the Chrysler Museum, and is supported by a generous grant from the Metropolitan Life Foundation. The biographical text is written by the distinguished photographic historian F. Jack Hurley with additional text on the significance of the music photographs penned by Daniel Wolff; and

WHEREAS, the show opened on January 28 and will run until May 7 of this year; at the opening, Ernest Withers gave a captivating lecture on his powerful photography portfolio and his years as a working artist; and

WHEREAS, the exhibit will also show a film series with each film focusing on a particular area of the works of Ernest Withers, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Civil Rights Movement, the bombing of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Church in Birmingham, Alabama, life on Beale Street during the Jazz Era, the Negro Baseball Leagues, and the renowned showdown between baseball legends Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson; and

WHEREAS, the incredible photography of Mr. Withers was featured in 1992 by the Massachusetts College of Art with an exhibition and catalogue entitled, *Let Us March On! Selected Civil Rights Photographs of Ernest C. Withers, 1955-1968*; and

WHEREAS, his sterling work has also been displayed in many publications, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Ebony*, *Jet*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Defender*, *The Tristate Defender*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *Amsterdam News*, and many others; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly finds it appropriate to pause in its deliberations to acknowledge and applaud Mr. Withers for his dedication to the state of Tennessee and its citizens; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, That we hereby honor and commend Mr. Ernest C. Withers for his lifetime of dedicated service to culture and education in the State of Tennessee and the United States, congratulate him on his featured works exhibit, "Pictures Tell the Story," and wish him every continued success in all future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.